

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7683

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE

SUBJ: CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS REACHES ELECTORAL AGREEMENT WITH
UNITED NATIONAL PARTY

1. SUMMARY: THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (CWC), REPRESENTING INDIAN TAMIL PLANTATION WORKERS, HAS ARRIVED AT A CONFIDENTIAL ELECTORAL AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY IN WHICH CWC PRESIDENT S. THONDAMAN IS SLATED FOR A CABINET POST IF THE UNP COMES TO POWER. ALTHOUGH THE UNP APPARENTLY OFFERED SOME CONCESSIONS TO THE TAMILS, THEY DID NOT INCLUDE SUCH ITEMS IN THE CWC MANIFESTO AS A MONTHLY MINIMUM WAGE OR CHANGES IN THE CITIZENSHIP LAWS. SINCE NEWLY-ENFRANCHISED INDIAN TAMILS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE CENTRAL PROVINCE, THE ELECTORAL AGREEMENT WILL PRIMARILY BENEFIT UNP CANDIDATES IN THAT AREA, ASSUMING CWC ORGANIZERS CAN QUIETLY AND EFFECTIVELY PASS THE WORD TO THEIR MEMBERS. ONE LONG RANGE GOAL OF THE CWC, FOR WHICH THEY PROBABLY LACK THE SUPPORT OF THE UNP, IS THE MODIFICATION OF THE INDO-SRI LANKA PACT OF 1964; A CWC OFFICER CLAIMS THE ORGANIZATION HAS RECENTLY EXCHANGED LETTERS ON THE SUBJECT WITH INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE CWC, THE LARGEST LABOR UNION AMONG THE INDIAN TAMILS ON THE TEA ESTATES AND NOW A POLITICAL PARTY AS WELL, HAS REACHED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE UNP TO SUPPORT IT IN THE CURRENT ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE AGREEMENT HAS BEEN KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AT THE REQUEST OF UNP LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE WHO FEARED A BACKLASH AMONG SINHALESE VOTERS.

3. UNDER THE AGREEMENT, CWC PRESIDENT S. THONDAMAN, EXPECTED TO WIN AN ASSEMBLY SEAT IN THE NUWARA ELIYA/MASKELIYA CONSTITUENCY, HAS BEEN PROMISED A CABINET POST, POSSIBLY THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES, IF THE UNP SHOULD COME TO POWER. THE MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT MIGHT BE DELAYED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER THE ELECTION TO AVOID CHARGES OF COLLUSION. THE MORE IMPORTANT PORTFOLIOS OF LABOR, AGRICULTURE, AND PLANTATIONS WERE APPARENTLY RULED OUT FOR THONDAMAN BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION REPRESENTING THE MINORITY INDIAN COMMUNITY. IN ADDITION TO THE CABINET POST, THE CWC HAS BEEN OFFERED UNOFFICIAL RECOGNITION AS THE SOLE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ONE MILLION-PLUS INDIAN TAMIL COMMUNITY OF SRI LANKA. (THIS COMMUNITY, AS DISTINCT FROM THE LONG-RESIDENT CEYLON TAMILS OF THE NORTH, ARE THE IMMIGRANTS BROUGHT FROM SOUTH INDIA DURING THE PAST 100 YEARS TO WORK ON THE TEA AND RUBBER ESTATES.) NOT ONLY WILL THE CWC BE CONSULTED AS A MATTER OF COURSE ON MATTERS PERTAINING TO THAT COMMUNITY, BUT THE UNP HAS ALSO AGREED TO TRY TO IMPLEMENT SOME CWC PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ALLEVIATE THE PLIGHT OF THE INDIAN TAMILS. IT IS NOT CLEAR JUST WHAT PLANKS OF THE CWC MANIFESTO THE UNP HAS AGREED TO, BUT THEY DO NOT INCLUDE THE BASIC DEMAND FOR A MONTHLY MINIMUM WAGE FOR ESTATE WORKERS.

4. IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE INDIAN TAMIL COMMUNITY WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY DISENFRANCHISED UNDER THE 1947 CITIZENSHIP LAWS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEY HAD SEVEN REPRESENTATIVES IN CEYLON'S PARLIAMENT. SINCE THAT TIME NONE HAS BEEN ELECTED. AS A RESULT OF THE GRANTING OF CITIZENSHIP TO SOME ESTATE WORKERS IN RECENT YEARS, HOWEVER, S. THONDAMAN SEEMS A CERTAIN WINNER IN THE THREE-MEMBER CONSTITUENCY OF NUWARA ELIYA/MASKELIYA, WHERE INDIAN TAMIL VOTERS MAKE UP ABOUT 1/3 OF THE TOTAL. IT IS IN THE OTHER TWENTY CONSTITUENCIES OF THE CENTRAL PROVINCE AND IN A FEW OTHER ESTATE AREAS THAT THE UNP HOPES TO PROFIT FROM ITS ELECTORAL PACT WITH THE CWC. IN MOST OF THEE OTHER CONSTITUENCIES, THE INDIAN TAMIL VOTE IS AROUND TWO OR THREE THOUSAND WITH A FEW CONSTITUENCIES CONTAINING ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND INDIAN TAMIL VOTES. (THE INDIAN TAMIL COMMUNITY IS ACTUALLY FAR BIGGER THAN THE VOTING TOTALS WOULD INDICATE, SINCE CITIZENSHIP AND VOTING RIGHTS HAVE SO FAR BEEN GRATED ONLY TO A SMALL PORTION OF THE COMMUNITY UNDER THE INDO-SRI LANKA PACT OF 1964.) THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT THONDAMAN CAN DELIVER ALL OF THE TAMIL VOTES BUT HE, MORE THAN ANY OTHR MAN, IS LOOKED UP TO AS THE LEADER OF THE COMMUNITY. ALL LOCAL CWC UNION ORGANIZERS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO INFORM UNP CANDIATES OF THEIR SUPPORT AND TO PASS THE WORD QUIETLY TO THEIR MEMBERS.

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5. EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF AN ELECTORAL PACT, IT SEEMS
LIKELY THAT MOST OF THE INDIAN TAMIL VOTE WOULD HAVE GONE TO
THE UNP. THE RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) HAS MADE
FEW FRIENDS IN THE ESTATE LABOR COMMUNITY IN THE LAST SEVEN
YEARS. AGRICULTURE MINISTER HECTOR KOBBEKADUWA IS A VOCIFEROUS
ANTI-INDIAN CAMPAIGNER AND RECENTLY SUGGESTED THAT THONDAMAN
SHOULD BE DEPORTED TO INDIA. HE HAS ALSO DENOUNCED THE EXIS-
TENCE OF A SECRET PACT BETWEEN THE UNP AND THE CWC, IN WHICH
THE UNP HAS SUPPOSEDLY PROMISED TO RETURN NATIONALIZED ESTATE
LANDS TO ITS OWNERS (INCLUDING THONDAMAN, WHO LOST 21,000
ACRES.) KOBBEKADUWA HAS ALSO EARNED THE TAMILS' ENMITY BY
DISTRIBUTING TEA ESTATE LAND AMONG THE KANDYAN SINHALESE
VILLAGERS, TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE TAMIL LABORERS OF THOSE
AREAS. THE MOST RECENT ATTEMPT TO DISTRIBUTE 7,000 ACRES
OF PRIME TEA LAND IN THE NUWARA KLIYA ELECTROATE AWAS A RATHER
BLATANT EFFORT TO BOOST THE CANDIDACY OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S
SON ANURA BANDARANAIKE, WHO OPPOSES THONDAMAN AND A UNP CAN-
DIDATE IN THAT CONSTITUENCY. THE MOVE BACKFIRED WHEN, DURING
A PROTEST AGAINST THE PLAN, A YOUNG TAMIL WAS KILLED AND
SINHALESE THUGS BURNED DOWN THE RESIDENTIAL BARRACKS ON
SEVERAL ESTATES.

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6. THE CWC FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS YEAR RECEIVED OFFICIAL

RECOGNITION FOR ITS "POLITICAL WING" TO CONTEST AS A POLITICAL PARTY. BESIDES THONDAMAN, IT IS RUNNING ITS GENERAL SECRETARY, S. SELLASAMY, IN CENTRAL COLOMBO, WHERE HIS VERY SLIGHT CHANCES FOR ELECTION DEPEND ON ATTRACTING THE VOTES OF THE CEYLON TAMIL COMMUNITY, A GROUP WHICH TENDS TO LOOK DOWN ON "INDIANS". THE CWC HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED ITS PLANS TO CONTEST VILLAGE AND TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS WHEN THOSE ARE HELD. IN THE PARTY'S ELECTION MANIFESTO, THE CWC CALLS FOR THE END OF THE DOUBLE STANDARD BETWEEN "CITIZENS BY REGISTRATION" (INDIAN TAMILS) AND "CITIZENS BY DESCENT" (ALL OTHERS). IN ADDITION IT CALLS FOR TAMIL TO BE AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE ALONG WITH SINHALESE AND FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SINGLE AUTHORITY TO MANAGE THE NOW-NATIONALIZED TEA PLANTATIONS. (FULL TEXT OF MANIFESTO HAS BEEN POUCHED TO NEA/INS AND INR/RNA/SOA.

7. ONE LONG RANGE GOAL OF THE CWC IS A REVISION OF THE 1964 SIRIMA-SHASTRI PACT WITH INDIA (REVISED IN 1974) WHICH PROVIDED FOR REPATRIATION TO INDIA OF SEVEN-ELEVENTHS OF THE INDIAN TAMIL COMMUNITY AND THE GRANTING OF SRI LANKAN CITIZENSHIP TO THE BALANCE. IT IS NOW BECOMING INCREASINGLY APPARENT THAT FAR MORE THAN FOUR-ELEVENTHS OF THE COMMUNITY WISH TO REMAIN IN SRI LANKA; THE CWC WOULD LIKE TO HELP THEM DO SO. AN EMBOFF WAS TOLD THAT THONDAMAN HAD COMMUNICATED ON THE SUBJECT WITH INDIAN PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI THROUGH THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER IN COLOMBO AND HAD, IN RETURN, RECEIVED A LETTER FROM DESAI IN WHICH HE SUPPOSEDLY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN REVIEWING THE PACT. SUCH A DECISION BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT IS NO CONCESSION ON ITS PART, SINCE ANY MODIFICATION OF THE AGREEMENT WOULD EAST THE BURDEN ON INDIA'S REPATRIATION PROGRAM; VERY SPIRITED OPPOSITION WOULD PROBABLY COME FROM THE SINHALESE POPULATION OF SRI LANKA. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE UNP HAS AGREED TO SUPPORT A RENEGOTIATION.
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